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Moscow Seeks Continuation of Talks

The USSR's stance during the first two Thompson-Gromyko talks is fully consistent with traditional Soviet negotiating tactics. The formal tabling of the USSR's sub-maximum demands — the free city proposal with attachments — is analogous to Moscow's opening proposal for a two-Germanies peace treaty at the Geneva Foreign Ministers' Conference, with the exception that the Soviets have now backed down from the latter, maximum demand.

This does not mean that the Soviet negotiating tactics will follow the same course as at Geneva; the situation is different in many respects. But both "openers" were made with full expectation of rejection by the West and were intended (1) to strengthen the Soviet position in future bargaining by starting from a tough, initial position; and (2) to provoke the US to table a concrete counter-proposal. (It has been a recurrent complaint in Soviet propaganda that the West has still not made any "concrete proposals.")

Other evidence supports the conclusion that the position outlined by Gromyko is designed to initiate negotiations, or at least keep them going, and that the Soviets have not reached a decision to go ahead with a separate treaty if these proposals are rejected.

Gromyko appeared to be bound by no set timetable. He mentioned no deadline and made no attempts to hurry or retard the pace of the talks and conveyed the impression of being amenable to alternative arrangements on Berlin. Also, his injection of broader issues such as European security into the discussions could provide the vehicle for an indefinite prolongation of negotiations.

In addition, all references to a deadline for a peace treaty have disappeared from Soviet and bloc commentaries. (References to a 1962 deadline known to have been made in two authoritative East German statements were deleted from the recently published versions of the statements.) There are also some indications the concept of a peace treaty itself as an immediate possibility is being relegated to the background. In any event, the Soviets have virtually ceased any public reference to a possible separate peace treaty and, contrary to familiar practice, have not attempted to prod the US in the talks by making menacing noises in public statements.^{1/}

In sum, the Soviets evidently regard the proposals tabled at the January 12 meeting as the beginning and not the end of a negotiating process; the proposals apparently were not made to set the stage for a rupture of talks but to set the stage for further talks.

1. An exception is the Polyanov article in Izvestiya of January 25. But even in this instance, Izvestiya virtually disavowed official sanction by noting that the views expressed by the author were his alone.

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The Soviets almost certainly would not expect the West to agree to an explicit renunciation of occupation rights, and, on the other hand, they would most definitely not agree to explicitly reaffirm these rights. Their aim in this likely second phase would be to probe Western intentions in regard to (1) an agreement on West Berlin of indefinite duration which they could interpret as a change in status (though not explicit) and which would change access modalities (combined with agreement on some "other" issues), or (2) an "interim" agreement of sorts of limited duration (or at least of non-indefinite duration). The latter type of Soviet-proposed solution would provide either for a relatively short-term (one to two year) arrangement on West Berlin pointed toward a free city solution, or an agreement on one of the "other issues" without any explicit agreement on Berlin (but which left the communists free to raise the issue again). (Moscow's implicit renunciation of its demand for a two Germanies peace treaty would seem to rule out its reverting to the "interim" proposal presented in its memorandum of June 4, 1961.)

At any time during this second stage of diplomatic probing, the Soviets might move to convene a formal four-power conference, depending, of course, on the Western position.

and

Or, assuming a diplomatic impasse, depending on its assessment of Western intentions and on its general foreign policy requirements, Moscow might at this stage finally move to conclude a separate treaty. This action, however, would probably not be taken in such fashion as to foreclose a negotiated arrangement or provoke a decisive showdown. The hypothesis that the Soviets have been stalling a separate treaty in anticipation of a near-term major increase in their strategic military posture, and thus are preparing for a showdown, is not consistent with what we know of Soviet military developments nor with Soviet handling of the Berlin problem during the last three years.

But if worst comes to worst, from the Soviet point of view, and they reach the conclusion there is no chance at this time for a negotiated settlement satisfactory to them, the Soviets more likely will be content to put the Berlin question on ice for an indefinite period and do without either concrete agreement or separate treaty. There are a number of circumstances which might lead the Soviets to this decision after a period of diplomatic probes or negotiations. The Wall has reduced the urgency of a Berlin settlement affecting East German access to West Berlin and air access out of West Berlin. If implemented boldly, a separate treaty could be risky and also stimulate a further military buildup in the West. (The Soviets are already feeling the economic pinch of the current military buildup by the US.) And the Soviets would probably prefer to hold the separate treaty

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threat in reserve if the alternative were a nominal implementation of the treaty. Finally, the Soviets might want to keep their hands free to deal with their more complex problems in the bloc.

If the Soviets came to this decision, they would be under compulsion to cover their retreat by at least some compensations. For example, they might seek some device for institutionalizing continuing East-West consultations on the German and related problems (perhaps combined with a nominal or tacit agreement on Berlin/Germany). Or, they might seek to recreate a detente atmosphere through arranging a series of top-level contacts with Western leaders.

However, even if this is the final outcome of the current Berlin situation, the communists are not likely to remain supine in the intervening period. At some stage in the diplomatic probings (or negotiations), they will probably seek to hasten Western concessions by threatening language regarding procrastination by the West.

Moreover, the Soviets at some stage will probably give the East Germans a green light for further unilateral moves in regard to Berlin, particularly if they conclude there is no hope for a broad diplomatic settlement and decide against an early separate treaty. Such East German actions would most likely involve new frontier controls, such as new limitations on access into East Berlin, the imposition of passport requirements for entry into the GDR and East Berlin (with the possible exception of military personnel), or new customs regulations for the shipment of goods.

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